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AFMC commander, union president build partnership

by Ron Fry, AFMC Public Affairs

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB, OHIO — The commander of Air Force Materiel Command and the national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO met at AFMC headquarters recently to discuss building stronger ties through active partnership councils at the command and base levels.

Gen. Lester Lyles and Bobby Harnage joined center directors and local union presidents from across the command in their discussions. Lyles leads the Air Force's largest civilian work force and Harnage's union represents the vast majority of AFMC's civilian employees. Keeping with his emphasis on communication, Lyles said maintaining clear lines of communication is critical to a successful partnership.

"There's not a thing we can't do if we all communicate," he said. "Partnership is the embodiment of the spirit of communication."

Harnage said AFMC and the union must have a strong partnership if the two are to deal with change effectively.

"A good partnership helps insulate us," Harnage told the gathering. "If we agree on what we're doing, we can stand up to any change."

Harnage applauded Lyles' support of efforts to strengthen the union-management partnership in AFMC, particularly efforts to operationalize partnerships at all levels.

AFMC Executive Director Dr. Daniel Stewart and AFGE Council 214 President Scott Blanch, co-chairs of the command-level partnership council, briefed the leaders. They discussed the council's vision, goals and objectives used to build a strategy to operationalize the partnership concept throughout AFMC.

Initiatives include:

- Developing a plan to establish Alternative Dispute Resolution processes at each base, allowing people a way to resolve workplace disputes without filing a formal grievance or unfair labor complaint.

- Working to come to an agreement on 105 Air Force Instructions previously converted from Air Force regulations. The command and AFGE have reached agreement on 72 of the AFIs and are making progress on the majority of the remaining instructions.

- Working with the AFMC Surgeon General's office to



PARTNERSHIP FORMED — Bobby L. Harnage, national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO, confers with Gen. Lester Lyles, commander of Air Force Materiel Command. The two met at AFMC Headquarters to discuss how to build a stronger partnership between the union and the command. (Air Force photo)

develop a command-wide policy for workers compensation and return-to-work issues.

To further operationalize the partnership concept, Lyles agreed to include it in the upcoming 2002 AFMC Strategic Plan.

Lyles and Harnage received a briefing on the upcoming negotiations for the Master Labor Agreement between AFGE and the command and heard an update on AFMC's work force shaping plan, an effort to replenish the command's aging civilian work force. They also received a presentation on the Air Force Research Laboratory Demonstration Project and its performance-based pay system.

Harnage said the command's work force shaping efforts are a challenge.

"We do have some differences, but we need to get together and discuss them," Harnage said. "The only way it's going to be done is through a partnership environment."

Lyles agreed and called for the command and AFGE to work together on a work force shaping legislative agenda that both the union and AFMC agree on.

Harnage did warn the group of his concern about further efforts to privatize work traditionally done by the government.

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“If we can’t control privatization, our efforts in pay and retention are for naught,” he said.

But he was impressed with the AFMC and AFGE Council 214 Partnership Council’s efforts.

“You’ve come a long way and done an outstanding job,” he told the group.

Harnage praised the efforts of Lyles and former AFMC Commander Gen. George Babbitt who led forming the partnership councils some 18 months ago.

Lyles extended an invitation to Harnage to visit AFMC bases to learn more about the command and its mission. @